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PHYSICAL CULTURE IN AMHERST COLLEGE.

To the Editors of the Amherst Student :—

Whether any report upon Physical Culture was made by the Trustees, through their committee, (consisting of President Stearns, Henry Ward Beecher, and myself,) at the last Commencement, I know not, as I was absent at the time from the country. Having taken a deep interest in physical education for a long time, and attempted the last year particularly to post myself thoroughly, both at home and abroad, as to its present aspects and prospects, I beg the use of one of your pages to express the result of my observations and inquiries.

It happens sometimes to institutions as to individuals, that they may have a good thing without fully appreciating it, and which it becomes their duty in some way to make known to others, though not in the spirit of rivalry or boasting. Such is the fact, in my opinion, with respect to Hygiene and Physical Culture in Amherst College. It is the only large educational institution in this country, and, I think, we may safely say, in the world, where the value and importance of properly *caring for the body* is officially recognized and enjoined. During an extensive tour in Europe, last season, I found nothing of the kind in England, France, Germany, or Prussia. In London I met with Prof. Gorgie from Sweden, and heard him give a lecture upon gymnastics, recounting the history and interest on the subject, as connected with education in Sweden, Germany, and other countries. I spent several days at Oxford, visited its famous gymnasium, and inquired carefully into its boating exercises, and found that these were all *voluntary*, that as far as the health and physical education of students were governed by any regulations or authority, the university as such was silent. This same fact is true in respect to the universities at Cambridge and at London, and also, as far as I could learn, of all other

large literary institutions in Great Britain. But, how different is the state of things at Amherst. This college has now had for twelve years a distinct department of *Physical Culture*, established upon the same high ground as that of Mathematics or Classics. We have among its teachers and professors a thoroughly educated physician as guardian of the health of the institution, to see that the laws of Hygiene are observed, to watch over the physical welfare of every student, striving to correct as far as possible all physical weaknesses, defects, and habits injurious to health, and in case of sickness advising and directing the best treatment. It is also made his duty to give lectures upon Hygienic Physiology, and the great laws of life and health; and in order to preserve a sound constitution and thereby prevent disease, a series of gymnastic exercises has been introduced as a part of the regular college duties, and every student, (except for physical imperfection,) is required to take part in them, under the inspection of his instructor. These exercises are so designed and varied as to exercise every part of the body in the most natural and beneficial manner. It is no part of the plan to develop particular muscles for great feats of agility and strength, but to train the whole body for its highest and most efficient action. It is intended that every muscle and tissue of the system shall be developed in harmony with every portion of the brain and faculty of the mind.

By this systematic training, 't is found that the students accomplish far more in their studies, thus elevating the standard of scholarship in this institution, while their constitutions in the meantime are not broken down or impaired,—so that *physically* as well as mentally they are better prepared for the more public and responsible duties of after years. It is also a well known fact that, since the introduction of these exercises there has been a decided improvement in the health of students generally, and less sickness as well as mortality.

There are two features in this department which are peculiar and deserve special notice. It was established by order of the Trustees, after the most careful consideration, and it has always received the sanction of the entire Faculty. Its exercises are not only compulsory, but faithful attendance upon them, as well as careful observance of the laws of Hygiene generally, are taken into account in making up the rank and scholarship of each student.

Every year's experience has satisfied the officers of the College more and more of the great advantages derived from this department; and, so great has been the interest of the public in it, outside of the institution, that the number present, from time to time, at these exercises, has averaged each year over four thousand persons. And so hearty in the appreciation of these advantages are the students, that they would dispense with any other department in college sooner than that of *Physical Culture*. The true secret of its success is found in the fact, that the Trustees and Faculty, from its commencement, have attached great importance to it, and given it character by making it one of the departments of the College. The students also deserve much credit for their zealous and practical endorsement of these measures.

If such is the connection of the mind with the body as to render all mental development and acquisition greatly dependent upon the strength and condition of the physical system, is it not the part of wisdom and duty to see, that in the training of

youth, in the educational process, the laws of the mind and body should be taken into account? Can any good reason be given why the laws of the one should be ignored or violated, when experience shows that such a course so often results in failure? Are not the laws of the body a part of the government of God, to which we owe allegiance as much as those of the mind or soul?

Modern science, in connection with the most advanced views of education, is teaching us more and more every year, the importance of good health—of a sound constitution, in order to secure the highest success in life; and this depends very much upon the proper care and training of the body in youth. It is becoming evident that physical culture is yet to occupy a far more prominent position in all our systems of education than heretofore, and must ere long be introduced in some form, into the regular exercises of all our schools, seminaries, and higher institutions of learning. We venture this prediction, that in no department of education will there be greater improvement for the next fifty years, than in a more perfect development of the human system and harmony of function, between the laws that govern both the mind and the body. And in no one thing will the history of Amherst College be more noted or distinguished than in the fact, that she took the lead in this great reform.

NATHAN ALLEN.

Lowell, April 1, 1873.

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